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Senate panel authorizes covert aid

But seeks redefinition
of policy on Nicaragua

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WASHINGTON — In a partial victory for Reagan Administration policies in Central America, the Senate Intelligence Committee on Friday authorized temporary continuation of covert support for Nicaraguan rebels fighting the Sandinista government.

The 15-member committee, in a nearly unanimous vote, approved compromise legislation calling upon President Reagan to submit a new "finding" — or redefinition — of precisely what the administration seeks to accomplish in Nicaragua before money will be approved for fiscal 1984.

The committee set the 1984 funding authorization for the covert operation at \$19 million, depending on acceptance of the redefinition.

The Senate panel had been expected to follow the lead of the House Intelligence Committee, which on Tuesday voted 9-5 to suspend funding for the covert operation.

In its place, the House legislation would set up an \$80-million fund for U.S. aid to "friendly nations" in the region, allowing them to openly pursue the same goals as the covert activity: halting alleged arms shipments from Nicaragua to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador.

The committee actions must be

taken up by the full House and Senate. If they survive in their present forms, they will go to a House-Senate conference committee, which will iron out the differences.

Members of the Senate Intelligence Committee declined to give a vote breakdown on Friday's action at their secret session, saying only that it was nearly unanimous.

The Senate committee said Reagan must present his new "finding" by Sept. 30, the end of fiscal 1983, if he hopes to get funding authorization for 1984.

Once the finding is submitted, the committee will convene for a vote. If the panel approves the finding, the CIA will be authorized to continue assisting the Nicaraguan rebels.

The decision was a compromise between those who wanted to end the covert operation and those who supported the administration.

Legal experts in the intelligence community said the committee action would, for the first time, have the effect of giving the congressional intelligence units veto power over a covert operation.

Until now, procedures governing the relationship between the CIA and the congressional intelligence panels required only that the president notify them that he intended to launch a covert action. No formal committee approval has been necessary.

The Senate Intelligence Committee action was disclosed at a rare news conference by Sen. Barry Goldwater (R., Ariz.) and Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D., N.Y.), committee chairman and vice chairman respectively.

The news conference came shortly after the committee voted. In attendance for the vote were William Casey, CIA director; Thomas Enders, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs; and Fred Ikle, under secretary of defense. All three urged the committee to continue the operation as funded origi-

nally 18 months ago.

The initial finding submitted in late 1981 reportedly requested \$19.9 million to assist the Nicaraguan rebels. The intelligence panels limited the program to halting Nicaraguan arms shipments to Salvadoran guerrillas. They forbade working for the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government.

However, several members of the intelligence committees, including Moynihan, charged that the administration had violated the congressional restrictions by seeking to oust the Sandinistas.

"The Senate intelligence oversight committee, after much discussion, passed what we call 'Alternative Three' instead of the amendment that had been offered which would have terminated covert action now," Goldwater said at the news conference.

Sen. David Durenberger (R., Minn.) had offered the so-called "Alternative Two" aimed at terminating "the President's covert action program," according to an intelligence committee document released after the vote. It said that "Alternative One," supported by Casey, Enders and Ikle, would have left the covert action as it is.

Goldwater said he spoke to President Reagan by telephone Thursday to outline the measure finally approved. He said Reagan reluctantly agreed to it.

"He would have been happier if we had left the whole thing alone, but that was not the will of the committee," said Goldwater. He also said the CIA had urged Reagan to submit a redefinition of the operation, apparently in an effort to reduce the controversy over the current program.

"Within one month at the most, we'll have a new position on Central America," Goldwater added. "I think it's perfectly plain to the President that we want a redefined position on Central America."

He said the new finding should contain, "in plain language," what Reagan intends to do in Nicaragua.

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